COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Reference: Capacity building in Indigenous communities

WEDNESDAY, 26 MARCH 2003

C A N B E R R A

Members: Mr Wakelin *(Chair)*, Ms Hoare *(Deputy Chair)*, Mr John Cobb, Mrs Draper, Ms Gillard, Mr Haase, Dr Lawrence, Mr Lloyd, Mr Snowdon and Mr Tollner

Members in attendance: Mr John Cobb, Ms Gillard, Mr Haase, Ms Hoare, Dr Lawrence, Mr Snowdon, Mr Tollner and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the committee will consider building the capacities of:

(a)   community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;

(b)   Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and

(c)   government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 4.42 p.m.

LARKIN, Mr Steven Raymond, Deputy Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

PARKER, Ms Kirstie, Executive Officer, Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

STRELEIN, Dr Lisa, Manager and Research Fellow, Native Title Research Unit, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

TAYLOR, Dr Luke, Director of Research, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

TAYLOR, Mr Russell Charles, Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities. I welcome the representatives of AIATSIS. I remind you that these are proceedings of the House. The committee prefers that evidence be given in public but if you require any evidence to be given in camera, let us know. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Taylor—We appreciate this window of opportunity to make some points about capacity building in relation to the institute's operations. Can I first and foremost apologise on behalf of my chairman, Professor Mick Dodson, who unfortunately was not able to come here this afternoon. I will make some very brief comments in relation to our submission, which I understand is in your hands. I will hopefully avoid verbatim repeating of anything that is in our submission, but I would like to make one or two points and then will open it up for questions from the committee.

The first point is that the institute feels that in relation to all of our operations there is a capacity building element in our activities. Our submission raises some concerns about the term and definitions of community capacity building. We believe that in the context of seeking some clarification, there is a need for the public policy community, the Indigenous community and certainly the research community to come together, if nothing else, to establish a clear understanding of what community capacity building might mean and how it might manifest itself and be implemented in community initiatives and programs.

The point that I would make that is also highlighted is that the institute feels that we stand ready and available and that we have a capacity to play a role in that dialogue. We believe that our activities, and particularly our research efforts, inform ways and means of achieving capacity building in Indigenous communities. I would make the point, as does the submission, that ultimately the process of capacity building must be a political one and that the future depends on the strength and capacities of individual Indigenous families and communities. They should be the primary building block in terms of any capacity building efforts.

Very briefly, I would like to mention some activities that AIATSIS is engaged in, just to highlight our preparedness and our capacity to add value to government and community efforts.

One is our research capacity and our programs. We have a 40-year history, a long history of collaborative and supportive research based on community ethics, community protocols and community needs. That is one of the strong points of our involvement in these issues. We also manage a number of other activities. I will mention them very briefly, if I may, with your permission.

CHAIR—Sure.

Mr Taylor—One is that our Native Title Research Unit is included in our research capacity. Dr Strelein heads that up. That makes a very strong contribution to the framework and dialogue for native title in this country. It provides support services and information and it promotes discussion for anybody that has an interest in native title, particularly native representative bodies and native title claimants. One of the emerging issues that we are currently trying to promote in our Native Title Research Unit is the need for some sort of focus on mediation and dispute resolution. We think that, if we are able to do that, it would certainly add to the capacity building not only of the people involved in native title but also of people in the broader context. Whilst we have not yet implemented our strategies, we are very excited about them. We have just got word that we have some resources to put together some research around models of disputation that might be appropriate in the Indigenous community. That is something that we are on about now and something that will have relevance to this committee in the future. I would also like to very briefly mention our work in languages.

CHAIR—There is a division in the House. We will adjourn briefly.

Proceedings suspended from 4.48 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Mr Taylor—Very briefly, so we can open it up for more meaningful interaction, can I just mention our work in linguistics, which is very important. We have, we think, a very effective program entitled the Preserving Endangered Language Heritage project. It is really all about repatriating language resources back to communities. As you are aware, there is a cultural revival in communities at the moment which is centred around language—reusing and reviving languages in communities. We play a very important role in that. We think that it directly or indirectly influences capacity building in the community, particularly in the cultural context.

I would also like to mention our Family History Unit. Suffice it to say that it is one of the initiatives that came out of the government's response to the *Bringing them home* report. We think it plays a very vital and integral role in terms of helping people research their family history; in particular, it has a very strong capacity building element that really is directed at the individual.

Another project of ours is the Australian Indigenous Cultural Network, which is all about tracking, identifying and reclaiming cultural and intellectual property, and doing so using state-of-the-art technology. It is something that the institute has always been involved in, but of recent times it has focused on building on demands from the community by individual Indigenous peoples as well as community organisations. It makes a sound contribution to capacity building. Once again, it initially focuses on the cultural aspect, but also, through the ownership of cultural property, it can have a link to economic development.

Another thing that we are very proud of is our involvement in the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre. We have previously addressed this committee about the centre. All I can say

is that, subject to your whim, we are very pleased to provide an update report on that. Probably the most important achievement of the centre is that 127 individual Indigenous people have gone through the programs. We expect that, by December next year, that figure will double. It is all about trying to strengthen individual capacity to achieve effective governance within people's respective and individual areas of endeavour, but it is particularly focused at the community level.

I would also like to mention digitisation in the context of the institute's activities. Technology plays a very important role. We believe that we demonstrate best practice in terms of how we are engaging in these technologies, particularly in digitisation. It is all about maximising and facilitating access to our archives and to our services. We are playing a very strong role in terms of trying to also up-skill community organisations and individuals in the use of those technologies.

Our grants program is a modest program, but it has been around a long time. It covers a diverse area of research interests. The priority area is research needs of communities. One of the aspects of our grants program is the training of Indigenous researchers. We believe that our grants program does this very effectively. Once again, it makes a sound contribution, and a long-term contribution, to capacity building.

I mention our research and involvement in governance issues. We have quite a track record in looking at community institutional management et cetera. We have quite a wealth of data around those issues. In recent times, we have created a specific visiting research fellow. The research fellowship is entitled 'Regional organisation and governance'. Through those research activities, we provide a contribution to capacity building.

As I think our submission mentions, we have also been interested in pursuing the fact that at the moment there is no focal point for coordination of research that is dealing with and looking at issues that go with governance and capacity building. We have had some discussions and made some submissions to the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Family and Community Services and ATSIC. We are interested in setting up and playing a pivotal role in coordinating those research activities, including providing clearing house services where we can bring together policy makers, particularly public policy makers, with relevant information. Without saying too much about that, we intend to pursue it because we feel that it is a deficiency in the public policy domain at the moment, and it is a deficiency or a void that we feel we can make a contribution towards eliminating.

That is about all. I am sorry if it has been a bit long winded, but I am happy to answer questions.

CHAIR—I apologise for the interruption too, though it was beyond our control. Firstly, I thank you and the AIATSIS chairman for the hospitality shown to us on Monday. That was much appreciated. It was comprehensive and those of us who attended were very appreciative. We also appreciated the comments afterwards. Those brief discussions provided quite a bit of context.

I will open the batting. I have about three basic questions. Russell, the last point you made about coordination was something I had in my mind before you said it. I know you are not at liberty to say too much at this stage, but I pricked up my ears when you mentioned the public

policy discussion—the breadth of it and the whole question. I wondered whether you were able to say a little bit more. Can I press you to say a little more about it? You may choose to come back a little later when you are better able to deal with it.

Mr Taylor—No, I am happy to deal with it now. We are trying to convince, in particular, agencies that have a direct influence on communities and capacity building that there is a proper, legitimate role for research in either the development or the implementation of public policy. In the context of recent developments, where agencies are trying to develop a whole-of-government approach, we believe that it is imperative—absolutely vital—that, for whatever is attempted and whatever is developed, there is some research that goes with it that can track the critical success factors. It arises from our concern that this is not happening.

Mr SNOWDON—Could you please excuse me. I have to speak in the chamber.

Mr Taylor—It comes out of our concerns that there is a lack of coordination in such research, that too often policy makers are trying to reinvent the wheel when it is not completely necessary and also that that sort of research should identify what works and what will not work, what is portable and what is not portable et cetera. We feel that there needs to be this coordinated approach and also that we can play a role in that.

CHAIR—It is a clearing house in the sense of, as you say, not reinventing the wheel, but having the body of knowledge—

Mr Taylor—Simply acting as a database—and a dynamic one—that can bring together those who want to develop and implement public policy with the latest research around the issues that interest them. I am not sure if our director of research wants to make a comment on that.

Dr Taylor—From where we sit, as a national organisation and with a grants program that is nationally available, we get to see who is doing research in the different areas. Informally, we have research networks which allow research to take place. What we are asking is whether we can move this to a more formal level and have agreements in place with other agencies—get government agencies around the table and say, 'What is the research that you would like to see happen around your program delivery? Can we together, as a research agency, design research that will facilitate it, track it and see if it is effective?' We just want to move it to a more formal level.

CHAIR—You may not think this is related, but an hour or two ago I was contemplating just what sorts of things I hoped to achieve in this brief session. Quite often you will hear Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organisations comment that they are 'about researched out'. I made mention before of the fact that we have an ATSIC review, that review, COAG, this committee review et cetera. Quite often you get an impression of reinventing the wheel as well as of the frustration of connection and achievement as we try to achieve outcomes. That is enough from me on that. I will quickly move to Lisa, if I may, in terms of the principal comments and Russell's comments about native title mediation and dispute resolution. You are at some preliminary stages perhaps. Would you be able to give us a conceptual view? This is a really significant approach. You are value adding to the whole process here, aren't you? It seems to me to be quite significant.

Dr Strelein—I guess this is one example of where the research has been taken up by policy agencies. We have been working for probably 2½ years in promoting the need for this research to be done. It has just come to fruition. We are receiving support from two of the organisations involved in native title processes that are directly involved in providing mediation services to the native title system broadly and to the Indigenous claimants more specifically. We are working with ATSIC, the native title representative bodies and the National Native Title Tribunal directly to try to bring this research project to fruition.

What is the project looking at? All of the agencies involved in native title have identified that there are significant blockages in the native title system that are making outcomes difficult to achieve if you are looking at outcomes in terms of specific agreements and native title determinations. Dispute amongst the parties is one of the key factors. It is not just within Indigenous communities; it concerns the state and federal governments not being able to agree within the state and disputes between the executive and the parliamentary representatives in terms of the difference between policy and government platforms.

Our advantage in the research that we do is directed towards the Indigenous realm of things. We have focused on the difficulties Indigenous people are having with the native title processes that have been introduced into the communities and often providing very outcome focused processes that do not necessarily take into account the pressure that they are creating on Indigenous communities.

The focus of the research is on two things. The first is the role of disputes in Indigenous communities and the way that those play out in native title processes and processes like that and the need to look at the kinds of techniques that are being used to try and resolve disputes and what kind of impact those are having. Traditional mediation models are outcome focused. They come from commercial legal processes and are not always equipped to deal with the cultural and community environment that they are being utilised in. One of the things we want to do is look at those models. We also want to look at the difference between trying to resolve disputes and trying to manage disputes, and to look towards building the capacity of Indigenous communities to make decisions and to form decision making structures that will sustain agreements over the long term. That is the focus of the project.

CHAIR—That is appreciated. Kirstie, can I just ask you this? You have seen us before. It is a dynamic situation; it looks pretty positive. Do you have anything to add? Have you had any new information in the last few months? Is there anything you would like to say?

Ms Parker—As you know, we presented to you in June last year. A couple of things have happened in the past six months that we think are significant achievements. The first is that we spoke to you about our certificate program in Indigenous leadership. At the time, it was a non-accredited course and we were seeking accreditation. I am delighted to say that we have received VET sector accreditation at certificate II and IV levels. We believe that this makes our courses, if not the only accredited leadership courses in the country, one of them, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Certainly there are only a handful of them. We have also had a number of further courses. As Russ mentioned, we now have had 127 graduates through our certificate program.

CHAIR—And a projection of significant increases?

Ms Parker—Yes. We are still compiling the data from our graduates in terms of the impact of our course on them. We are relying at the moment on anecdotal information. All of the feedback has been absolutely exceptional. Our graduates have done amazing things. There are a couple that stand out. One of our young ones, a 23-year-old—bearing in mind that our courses are not age specific—was so inspired by her participation in our course in Darwin that she stood for election to ATSIC and she polled the highest ever number of first preference votes for any ATSIC candidate in her region, which was actually Geoff Clark's region. She is now on the regional council. A couple of our graduates have gone overseas and represented Australia. There are a couple on the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and another is a representative of Australia in the pre-Olympic negotiations in Athens. So there has been excellent feedback.

They are the kind of milestone achievements, combined with the fact that two of our certificate course graduates are on the leadership centre board, and that is a big thing for us as well. We are in a consolidating period at the moment. We are in our fourth year of operation. We are coming to the end of our first phase of support from our major corporate sponsor, Citigroup, so it is a time of stress in terms of our resources at the moment regarding building for the future. But we are looking forward to our diploma program, which again is a high-level program which will start later this year. We have let the tender and it is under development now. Also, later this year there will be the start of our mentorship program for our graduates, which is a really important way for us to value add to the courses that our graduates go on. I have one other very quick point to make. I thank the committee for its representation at our Canberra course parliamentary reception. Our graduates were absolutely blown away.

CHAIR—It was our pleasure. And what about the minister in his footy jumper!

Ms Parker—I don't know whether he has worn it since but he certainly put it on straight away.

Mr Taylor—We have probably said this before but it is worth saying again: the model that the leadership centre represents, which is a partnership between corporate Australia, government and the community sector, is a very good one. If nothing else, even in our fundraising efforts, we try to promote the model, even if it does not necessarily attract resources to the leadership centre, because it is a very effective model.

Ms HOARE—I have a quick question to you, Russell. I am no academic so I am struggling a bit with the research side—the clearing house for research and working with government. I think I have a bit of a grip on it. You might correct me if I am wrong. Would you anticipate seeing that as a model for policy makers in the education field—looking at research which has been done, like the clearing house, in relation to remote primary education and remote and urban high school education for Aboriginal people? The same question can be put in relation to health services and right across the board regarding all government departments. I need it put in simpler terms, if you could.

Mr Taylor—I will ask Luke to respond.

Dr Taylor—The council of the institute for some time has been saying, 'Listen, we want the research to have practical outcomes.' Over 40 years the institute has changed its direction to have this more practical orientation. What we are saying here is: let us form partnerships with government agencies. They tell us their requirement in terms of research. If they have a

program they want to roll out and they want to test the effectiveness of that program, let us join with the research agency which has some expertise with working with communities and try together to design research that facilitates that program delivery.

Education is not one of our research strengths, but we can develop strengths in areas in which we are resourced. We can identify areas in which we are much stronger right now; for example, in the health area we are now a core partner of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health. That allows us to work with other partners—other universities across the country—in the design of research with Aboriginal communities that will facilitate our particular area. Similarly in governance, we have a strength that rests primarily on the area of native title but which links with other areas of governance, like regional agreement facilitation. We are trying to build units of research strength that can link with the appropriate government agencies to help design research together around program delivery.

Ms HOARE—That seems to make sense. Having regard to the way that the government employs consultants for this, I am surprised that it has never occurred at the institute.

Mr Larkin—This is coming from an observation or experience of public policy to date, particularly of Indigenous affairs. You probably would have noticed about two or three budgets ago that there was a raft of programs that got up in Indigenous affairs. There was one for employment, workplace relations, converting the CDEPs into employment centres, the regional agreements one in ATSIC, and the PCAP in health. They were all strongly underpinned by capacity building and governance issues. Although the departments do try to undertake research functions when they are trying to implement these programs, it is our experience and observation that they are not research institutions. Quite often they have to do it on the run, and probably with a dearth of information about models—what works and what does not work nationally and internationally.

Part of what we are trying to propose with this national clearing house function is to look at what sorts of things work and why they do or do not work contextually, so that we do not use the broad brush in trying to say one approach fits all, which has been a part of the problem. In fact, in specific instances and contexts, some things work and some do not. But it is a matter of trying to draw out that collective corporate memory across government, because if you are working at the senior levels in the public service with responsibility for implementing these programs you do not have the time. It should not just be left to someone's second guess: 'I think this might work—hopefully; let's convince the minister and see how it goes.' We are trying to add value and say, 'Whilst you're developing the processes and protocols for rolling out the program, there can be a research program in place that is practical and policy orientated, which can give you some comfort and certainty in certain areas and have the program evaluated.' That is where we are coming from.

Ms HOARE—I understand it better now.

Mr Taylor—Picking up the chairman's comment earlier about Indigenous people, we have heard it often; we are researched to death. From the institute's point of view, part of the difference is that any research that we either do ourselves or that we promote or support has to be driven by informed community consent and community ownership. Whatever the outcomes are have to be shared with the community. In terms of the public policy aspects, quite often communities in that collaborative relationship, once the nature of the research is

communicated—whether it be substance abuse or some other negative issue in their lives and communities—their resistance and their negative attitudes towards the research community dilute somewhat. As part of our submission, we do have quite considerable experience in brokering those arrangements and relationships in a more positive way between the Indigenous community and the research community, including our own researchers. Most of the time, where there is a public policy outcome, it does have tremendous capacity building potential.

CHAIR—That is an excellent comment.

Mr HAASE—My first question is: where do you currently draw your briefs from to conduct research?

Mr Taylor—I will answer that, then I will ask my colleagues to correct anything. First of all, we have an institutional approach to strategic research activities in terms of relying on their networks. We also rely on a network of networks to see what might be driving community interests and needs in research. We also are guided by feedback, critique and information that comes from conducting our own research grants program. That is very informative in identifying not so much what research is being undertaken but where gaps may appear. In answer to your question, it is true to say that up until fairly recently our research was more in the classical academic domain. It has only been fairly recently that the institute has really tried to develop a public policy capacity. So we have been more attuned to the needs of government and we look to government papers and budgetary papers and other issues that might provide some advice and information about where there may be fertile ground for further research. So I guess, in answer to your question, it is a combination of issues. Certainly, we do not identify research needs from any one source. Of course, our staff, our council members and our own members provide information to us that might enable us to develop some sort of hierarchy of needs in research areas.

I have to say that this is within an imperfect world of limited resources and we are continually trying to do two things. The first is to make sure that all of our research has some value to both the community and the body of knowledge in a more general context. The second is to make sure that we are attuned to which emerging issues may require and demand research, such as native title. The mediation issue is a good one. We have identified that simply from our own involvement in the native title debates and discourse.

Mr HAASE—That is a fair bit of information. I am so conscious of time, once again. We always come up against this damn thing, time. I wanted to progress further. In the first few lines of your opening statement you said that capacity building will always be a question of politics. In that regard, I come back to your briefs and your research. Having received a brief or having made a decision as an institution to carry out research, could you give me an example of how a particular body of research has gone on to create further capacity or to make some change in the community?

Mr Taylor—A simple example would be the work of Dr Maggie Brady, who was probably one of the only researchers at the time who was doing any work at all on substance abuse. The outcome of that research turned into a practical guideline for communities who want to address substance abuse, and actions and initiatives they might want to develop within their communities to address that problem. That is a simple example but a very practical one. The grog book is one that is still in demand. It is one of the few resources around that deals

specifically with, in this case, alcohol in Indigenous communities. We have had only a limited capacity to do research in the area of health. We have done research in environmental health and related issues, but we have not really got into the health issue. We have been trying to increase our capacity in that regard.

Mr HAASE—When you say increase your capacity, do you mean research ability, knowledge or funds? Be specific.

Mr Taylor—All of the above. I will ask Steve to mention one, but we have initiated several attempts in the past to attract resources to the institute to enable us to have a greater capacity to do research specifically in the area of Indigenous health. I have to say that has been with only modest success.

One of the reasons we have done that is that, up until fairly recently, we have left that sort of research to others. What we have found, and what our own council and our own stakeholders have said, is that the improvements and the progress in health are just not evident. They say, 'What can we do?' This is a catalyst for us to say that maybe we can do something. The work of Maggie Brady that I mentioned is only one example, but it is a very valid one, particularly in terms of capacity building. It is a very good one, I believe.

Mr HAASE—It is only one, but I just want to get in here the fact that you have just said another huge mouthful. With respect to this research into improvement of health and all that has been done, I think your words were 'and yet there is no apparent evidence of improvement'.

Mr Taylor—There are some improvements.

Mr HAASE—As we all know.

Mr Taylor—But not to the extent that we would all wish.

Mr HAASE—As a broad-brush observation, you would say that there has been small movement.

Mr Taylor—Sure.

Mr HAASE—I am reminded of the likes of Ernie Bridge, who, with very limited resources, is now making a difference. Have you heard of his movements in the type 2 diabetes research?

Mr Taylor—No, I have not.

Mr HAASE—He has moved through Yungnora—old Noonkanbah—and also now Jigalong. By putting volunteers in—role model volunteers from the broad community, such as sports stars, ex-pollies and so on—he is introducing consciousness of eating, drinking and lifestyle habits and creating walking clubs and reward programs. People are saying, 'Yes, I've lost 20 kilos and I don't drink sugar content drinks any more. There are no fatty foods and we have salt-free and sugar-free pies in the canteen now.' It is good stuff. He has done that with a very small resource. It is quite remarkable that he is right there at the coalface and he is making—

CHAIR—We will leave that.

Mr HAASE—Here I am whingeing about the time. Anyway, sorry, Steve, what did you want to tell me.

Mr Larkin—Russell's comment about things not being done is very true. The sort of research you tend to get is very one-off and specific. It is mainly through consultancies, so it is very region specific, very much of a snapshot type thing. It is very hard to make comparisons or to take that sort of information and apply it across the spectrum. There is the thing I spoke about before. The need for a national clearing house is why we are putting it up. Otherwise, we cannot see that function occurring—not just in health, but in capacity building and governance in general.

The other comment I would make on a more global level is this. You might recall that, not so long ago, community development was the philosophy and the practice that was being put forward. Then that fell away and we had primary health care with the WHO model and the stuff out of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. That fell away. Now we have capacity building. It keeps coming back. It is the same thing; it keeps coming back. All those things are good community development. The question we need to ask is this: why does it keep coming back? Does it indicate there is a way of working that people find there is some strength in at a government and community level that does certain things with people and makes some effective outcomes that are sustainable? That is the question I would put. We keep coming back to that model in a way. We keep calling it something different, but it is the same thing.

Dr LAWRENCE—My question follows almost directly from that. You made an observation in your submission about your concern at the widespread and uninformed use of the term 'capacity building'—I have seen plenty of that too—and its potential to wreak havoc in Indigenous communities. First of all, would you care to comment further on that?

The second thing is this. You underline very strongly in your submission the need for a recognition of, if you like, the circumstances that Indigenous people confront, and in particular the experiences they have had as a result of colonial oppression, effectively. How ready do you think government departments and agencies are to really do that and to build it into their programs? You underline the need for capacity in Indigenous people's ability to determine their own values and priorities. I worry about some of the programs I have seen which essentially rely on the enthusiasm of a single individual coming in and working miracles. Then he or she disappears and the whole thing falls apart because that has not been attended to. I would like your comments about some of the risks attendant on this current fashion sweeping the world.

Finally, and I will shut up then, I would like your comments on the existing relationships you mentioned between Indigenous communities and governments being an important part of the whole analysis of capacity building.

Mr Taylor—In terms of the 'wreak havoc' comment, what we are concerned about is not the intent and what capacity building is all about. We think that conceptually it is honourable and worth while. It can produce wonderful outcomes. But in terms of how it is applied, if all it is going to do is create another competitive rush for resources and expediency in how they are expended et cetera, including the whole-of-government approach to this, it is just going to see

another faddish public policy wave come and go without anything sustainable. That underlines our concern.

Dr LAWRENCE—With all the attendant cynicism when it falls apart.

Mr Taylor—Yes, exactly. As to the other aspects, you will have to help me.

Mr Larkin—I would like to speak about my earlier comments around the cyclical nature of the community development paradigm and how it has now become capacity building. My observation and experience was that, when these philosophies and approaches were initially embraced, it was probably done very quickly. It probably varied but there was probably a limited understanding of the philosophy and the concepts. In some areas, that translated into a minimal commitment across the public sector, state and Commonwealth, and that is then reflected in a minimal allocation of resources towards such things as professional development.

I remember that in the early 1980s health professionals said, 'We're supposed to be doing primary health care, but no-one is telling us how to do it.' The combination of those sorts of things manifests itself in poor implementation of the models or substandard implementation. They fall down. I think that the model is unfairly maligned. It was never fully resourced or understood in the first place. A very large and important part of the whole process is engaging the community actively in a whole lot of key processes with planning, implementation and evaluation. If you do not have that level of understanding across all those levels, that sort of stuff is going to be minimal as well. The Indigenous experience has been largely—I cannot speak for everyone in the country, just from my own observation—negative. People have a negative experience with what is actually a positive model. I do not think it is the model. I thought the reason was that it was poorly understood, poorly committed to, poorly resourced and poorly engaged.

Having said that, I still think the model stands firm. I think it is a good way of working. I think it needs to be incorporated very seriously as part of professional and corporate culture within departments. At the same time, the activities can largely be described as very qualitative. That makes it hard to ask whether it is working. Part of the challenge there is to come up with evaluation models that are able to measure not just quantitative activity but also qualitative activity. Sometimes progress can go unseen because we are looking for the numbers but there are changes in behaviour. Those sorts of things can be incorporated more when taking these models on. That is the way you can manifest it. The other part is being accountable to show that the model is worth investing in time and again, and having it in mind that some of these things do take time. Some of these things will be transgenerational. But certainly you have to start from somewhere.

It is not as if communities are starting in a vacuum. An example I use is Central Australia, where people are able to organise large events like funerals—unfortunately funerals—or ceremonial activities with in excess of 1,000 people. To be able to do that and get everyone in one place at one specific time at a certain time of the year shows that there is some managerial and other administrative expertise. It does not necessarily translate into some of the key areas like health, but it is part of a demystification process. That is part of the capacity building process, I suppose—to be able to disseminate information effectively so that people understand how systems work. It is not as if they do not understand anything at all. It is just part of ethnocentricity and neocolonialism.

Dr LAWRENCE—One of the things that I have pushed in the past—and it strikes me that it comes through in your submission—is that we often think of capacity building as a one-sided affair. The reality is that government programs are constructed so as to make it as difficult as possible—it almost seems perversely so. Native title would be a classic case but there are plenty of others, with health bodies administering 60 or 70 different funding programs. But there is also a lack of awareness on the part of many of the program designers and those who deliver the programs of the culture that they are supposed to be working in partnership with, so it is a very lopsided arrangement. I hope that this committee will make some recommendations too about capacity building in government and other agencies which deal with Indigenous communities.

Mr Larkin—I think so. I think the interesting thing would be how we are able to get these effective models and approaches in place when you have the new public management model. Some of the literature is suggesting already that it is not too friendly at times to human service type endeavours.

Mr Taylor—The issue of whether things fall over is going to be the litmus test in terms of this whole-of-government approach. When all of sudden things are withdrawn, how sustainable is it? While we think there is a role for research—but it is not just a research issue—the two factors that come into play are governance and leadership. The institute is trying to do something about both. We need a new sort of leadership. An American bloke talks about adaptive leadership, which is leadership that addresses people's capacity to resolve issues themselves in concert with government and with other players, rather than just the leadership that takes people to a point and then leaves them. That is a critical issue in the context of this committee because what that involves, of course, is attention to the individual.

As you said, there are people in communities who do have skills. These need to be recognised and they need to be enhanced. The individual is a fundamental building block. In recent times, a public policy has been developed at institutional level. That is not a bad thing, but I think it has been at the expense of individuals. Hopefully, that is now being recognised—and I am sure it has been recognised—and it is being addressed. There is a role in research for that in the context of when things do fall over. The research should show whether the model was good or whether it was some other factor. Or was the model not appropriate? That is a proper role for research.

Mr TOLLNER—I have a couple of comments. I would like to get this on the public record. I thank you very much for the tour on Monday. For me it was a great eye-opener. I was impressed by a lot of things that you do there, in particular the work that you are doing with saving languages and that sort of stuff. I think that is vitally important. I would like it if you could pass that on to Dr Dodson as well.

Mr Taylor—I certainly will. Thank you.

Mr TOLLNER—In the interests of time, that is all I wanted to say.

Mr JOHN COBB—I wanted to ask Kirstie something. I have a lot of interest in leadership, so I am interested to know how you choose the people that you want to work with. Do you bring people from all around Australia from different backgrounds together or do you do it in their communities? Is there an age issue? How do you actually choose your people?

Ms Parker—There are a couple of things there. We are not age specific. That is in recognition of the big investment that we have to make in our young people but also the fact that a lot of older people in our community have not had access or exposure to education. They might go back as mature age students and it is only later in life that they either play or aspire to play a leadership role. So it is both of them. Our graduates have been aged between 19 and 56, so there has been a huge variation. There is huge diversity in terms of where they are from and where they work or volunteer: government departments and agencies, the private sector and community organisations, across the board.

There are slightly more women than men—I am just going through the statistics now for you—and that reflects also the application breakdown. We have received more applications from women as well. In terms of how we choose them it is good, but we are still trying to work out what it means—if it means that Indigenous women are playing more of a role in their communities or if they are better placed to go on a course such as ours, but we are still getting our heads around that.

In terms of how we select them, it is an application-driven process, so people need to apply. We do our best to communicate to people that our courses are on. We advertise in the mainstream and Indigenous media, and for the last three or four courses, we also did a direct mail-out to Indigenous organisations on ATSIC's database—about 3,000 organisations in all spheres and realms. We ask applicants to our courses to demonstrate their leadership experience, their ability and their potential. They do it themselves. They also get two referees, usually from a community organisation, to attest to those qualities. Part of that refereeing process is having communities say to us, 'This person is going to be important to our community. They're not just a great person in their own right, we also think they will be a leader. But we have a stake in them and they have a stake in us as well.'

Mr JOHN COBB—Do you bring them all together?

Ms Parker—We do.

Mr JOHN COBB—Where do you do that?

Ms Parker—We do it at two levels. One is a national level where we bring people from all around Australia to a central point. The locations of those courses have changed. We have had four: one in Sydney, one in Adelaide, one in Darwin and the last one in Canberra in December last year. We also run them on a regional basis where we draw our applicants only from within a region and hold it on-site. We have held two of those. One was in Mr Haase's electorate in Port Hedland and the other was in Newcastle late last year.

Mr JOHN COBB—How long do they run for?

Ms Parker—The certificate courses run for seven days. It is an intense seven-day period, and participants do a pre-course assignment. Once someone has been selected, done a pre-course assignment, completed the seven days and participated in an acceptable and efficient way, they have attained a certificate level II. Some people will say, 'That's enough for me. I've had this experience. I've built my networks. That's the end of it.' Some people, though, will decide to engage in our mentorship program, undertake a leadership plan or diary of their own for about 12 weeks and undertake a community project, which is usually profiling their community. If

they do those three things, combined with the course and the pre-course assignment, they can attain a certificate level IV. So it really is up to participants in the course to decide how far they go.

Mr Taylor—One of the things superimposed over our course is the post-course experience. Once they are selected participants are thrown into an electronic email chat group. They introduce themselves and interact before they come together. Once they have graduated they go into a broader alumni electronic group. The traffic is fairly brisk at the moment—and has been since we started it—in all sorts of areas: problem solving, sharing information between communities, seeking answers, and testing newer experience and newer views. We find, and our alumni tell us, that this is a very valuable addition to their having gone through our course.

Mr JOHN COBB—Does that mean they have to be fairly educated people to get started?

Mr Taylor—No, not in a formal sense. We have had Sidney Moodie, whom I am sure Barry would know, lawyers and a surgeon. In the Darwin course I think we had something like half a dozen CEOs of community based organisations, including native title representative bodies, about four lawyers and one surgeon—a huge mix, including CDEP people. So it is quite diverse.

Ms Parker—In terms of formal qualifications or formal education we do not have—

Mr JOHN COBB—They do not have to have them?

Ms Parker—They do not. In fact, we ask people to identify factors that may impact on their participation in the course. We ask: 'What are your literacy levels like? Is English your first, second or third language?' We say to people that they do not need to be able to write in an Aboriginal community to play a leadership role. There are plenty of community chairpersons out there who can barely read, because they have not had that sort of access to education. But they are playing a role, and their community relies very heavily on them. When we select people one of the things we consider is whether the community is going to anoint them as their leader—and it really is the community's position to anoint someone as their leader. Are they going to say, 'This is our leader,' whether or not they are supported? If they are we have something of an obligation to support them along the way because they are going to be there.

Mr Taylor—The dynamics of the course are very collegiate so that people are aware that not only do they have an obligation to meet the expectations that we have of them but also part of their obligation is to assist and support others to get through the same process. That is a very strong part of how we run the program.

Ms Parker—It makes it quite a challenge, but it is one we deal with in various ways, like having a buddy system. When we run the courses we accommodate people together—

Mr JOHN COBB—So it does not lock out the natural leaders.

Mr Taylor—No, not at all.

Ms Parker—No.

CHAIR—That is about it. Warren has given me the nod that he is all clear.

Mr SNOWDON—That is a surprise!

Ms HOARE—You must have thought he mustn't have come back!

CHAIR—We have dealt with that.

Mr SNOWDON—Make a note of that, though, because I will make up for it next time.

CHAIR—I bet you will. We thank you very much and acknowledge and observe that AIATSIS is very much alive, well and kicking.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 5.50 p.m.